



Township of Georgian Bay – Office of the Mayor

April 20, 2020

Sent Via Email

The Honourable Doug Ford, M.P.P.
Premier of Ontario

Dear Premier:

**RE: Emergency Orders with Regard to Stopping the Spread of Covid-19 –
Seasonal Residences**

On behalf of the Council and residents of the Township of Georgian Bay, I am writing you regarding the challenges faced by us in our corner of what is often called cottage country. We have many times heard your encouragement to 'stay home', and, more specifically, not go to our seasonal homes. We are told essential travel only. However, it is not always that simple in these very challenging times.

With this letter, my key points are:

1. Without further action and orders, road-access cottagers will continue to flock north.
2. The distinction between primary and secondary residences is not clear.
3. For water-access only cottagers, boats are for transportation first, recreation second.
4. Marinas should be allowed to prepare for boating season while they are closed.
5. If we need to be more serious about stopping the spread of COVID-19, then all non-essential travel and any occupation of secondary residences should be subject to orders and fines.
6. If you will soon be able to consider starting to lift restrictions, then all residents should be allowed to access their summer homes, including through marinas.
7. Thank you for all you are doing for us during this pandemic. It is greatly appreciated!

In the Township of Georgian Bay, approximately 85% of our residents are seasonal, of which about 60% have water-access only properties. With the marinas closed, most water-access only residences have not yet been opened this year. However, far more road access cottages are now being used than in any prior April. A significant portion of our land based seasonal residents have chosen not to heed the federal and provincial pleas to stay home. Instead, they feel safer being at their cottage.

Traditionally, the difference between a home and a cottage was easy to understand, and, consequently, the difference between a permanent versus a seasonal resident. However, that distinction is much less clear now. For example, many residents have built year-round homes where summer cottages used to stand, and they use them 5 to 8 months of the year almost full-time. For many of these folks, and especially if they are snowbirds, their 'cottage' is, in effect and importance, their primary residence.

Our marinas have been closed, by Order of the Province, to minimize recreational boating. However, to water-access only residents, boating is by necessity primarily transportation, not recreation. Closing marinas is the same to them as a roadblock to everyone else. But - we have not seen any roadblocks.

Spring is normally a very busy time of year for marinas, as everyone wants to get out to their cottage as soon as possible. Usually, it takes about a month to get all the boats in the water. However, this year, everyone will want their boat the day the restrictions are lifted. Marinas would appreciate confirmation that they may now prepare and service boats, while remaining closed to the public and maintaining their own physical distancing. They could then be ready for the rush we all know is coming.

We share your frustration watching so many people ignoring the directions given to them to stay home. While we can certainly appreciate why families would want to isolate at their cottage, some with very legitimate reasons, we also understand very well why you recommend that most stay where there are more resources to support them should they become ill, and that less travel does mean less spread.

If the evidence shows that the curve is not flattening, then you might want to consider ordering essential travel only, and ordering isolation in primary residences only. A type of lockdown, if you will. To effectively say that anyone travelling to, or residing in, their cottage could be subject to a fine. In other words, converting your current pleas into future orders.

However, if the evidence soon suggests you might be able to start lifting restrictions, and you accept that many people will go to their cottage regardless of what you say, you could consider a first step of allowing marinas to serve water-access only residents. This could be as simple as removing the descriptive 'primary' in front of residences in your current Order. This would still restrict recreational boating until such time as you determine parks and other recreational sites can be opened to the public.

Thank you so much for all you are doing for all of us during these very challenging times! It is hugely appreciated. It is hard to imagine all the overwhelming information and perspectives you must balance as you lead us through this period unprecedented in most of our lifetimes. Please know you have the support of the great majority of us even as you restrict our activities.

Thank you very much for considering our input.

Yours sincerely,

Peter

Peter Koetsier
Mayor
Township of Georgian Bay

- c. The Right Honourable, Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable, Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
The Honourable, Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation
The Honourable, Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General
The Honourable, Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Mr. Scott Aitchison, MP, Parry Sound – Muskoka
Mr. Norm Miller, MPP, Parry Sound - Muskoka
Mr. John Klinck, Chair, District of Muskoka
Chief Barron King, Moose Deer Point First Nation
Chief Philip Franks, Wahta Mohawks